

Remarks by the Honorable Sean O'Keefe  
NASA Administrator  
NASA-U.S. Department of Agriculture MOU Signing Ceremony  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D.C.  
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Thank you Ghassem (Dr. Ghassem Asrar, Associate Administrator for Earth Science) for that gracious introduction, and to you Secretary Veneman (Ann Veneman, Secretary of Agriculture) and Undersecretary Jen (Dr. Joseph Jen, USDA Undersecretary for Research, Education and Economics) for inviting us over to the Agriculture Department here this morning and to mark this very important event that certainly these two gentlemen to my right have worked so hard on. And Secretary Veneman and myself are just the beneficiaries of the activity that they've engaged so much effort in dealing with here.

This is an important new chapter in NASA's relatively short tenure as an agency in cooperation with a long established department of the Federal government. And certainly one that has continued for some 30 years and taking it to new levels that Dr. Asrar referred to, which is to specifically make available to those who are the consumers and users of this information the data that they've analyzed.

Certainly, when the public thinks about NASA they think about the pioneering work on aeronautics and space exploration. And those are the primary efforts that come to mind.

But in many ways today's effort opens a new chapter in the collective efforts between the Agriculture Department and NASA to tap the unique perspectives offered by satellites to help the American farmer produce food and fiber for the American people and millions of consumers throughout the world in an entirely different and more informed way.

Beginning with our cooperation on the Landsat series of satellites, begun in the 1970's, we've worked arm in arm to help pioneer the use of satellite technology for Earth resources applications and better management of crop and rangeland.

With this agreement, we will join forces on a new series of programs drawing on NASA's pioneering technological capabilities in monitoring, mapping, modeling and systems engineering to help protect the environment and enhance American agriculture's ability to compete in the world market more effectively.

Now based on some of the outstanding cooperation between the USDA and NASA we've pinpointed five focus areas for additional research, and the development of support tools in the application of remote sensing technologies. These areas are carbon

management, agricultural competitiveness, air quality, water management and conservation, and the management of invasive species, which is certainly an element and aspect of what we are capable of doing as a consequence of satellite research and improvements that have been made that are quite novel today.

We do know today that NASA's ability to view the Earth from the unique vantage point of space provides useful data to enhance our ability to predict climate, weather and natural hazards, as well as to mitigate and assess the effects of natural and human-related disasters.

That is why our Earth Science Enterprise, under Ghassam's extraordinary leadership is working to put in place a flotilla of 26 Earth observing satellites and developing other technologies that will help provide scientists a solid foundation for understanding the complex Earth climate system.

That's our first goal and mission at NASA, of the three we've adopted, to understand and protect the home planet. And certainly it's in the right and capable hands of Gassam Asrar, and with the expansive kinds of approaches we've taken to utilize these kinds of technologies for greater purpose for greater yield and public advantage. We hope that the relevant and concise information provided by these satellites to our colleagues at USDA and other government agencies will help them make critical, accurate, and

timely decisions that will enhance the management of the U.S. natural resources across the board.

The signing of this MOU, and its specific projects will also support President Bush's Management Agenda by emphasizing the importance of integrated performance and budget to provide solutions for our citizens. So we think we have a winner all the way around in terms of the approach that we are taken with this particular effort.

The entire engagement here would not have been possible would it not be for the extraordinary leadership of Secretary Ann Veneman who, as many of you know, has spent her entire life working on food and farm issues, and advancing sound U.S. farm and food policies. The President has often said that the spirit of the American farmer is emblematic of the spirit of America, signifying the values of hard work, of faith and of entrepreneurship.

In Ann Veneman, he has selected an outstanding advocate for the American farmer whose tenure has been characterized by her work to foster economic opportunities for farmers and ranchers, ensure a safe and wholesome food supply, encourage conservation and environmental stewardship, and to help develop the next generation of agricultural leaders, much as we at NASA attempt to to inspire the next generation of explorers. So it's a very close relationship in that regard as well.

I'd also like to thank Secretary Veneman for the extraordinary effort on behalf of NASA through the Forest Service, undertaken during the course of her leadership and as a consequence of her direct interest in the real challenges we faced with the recovery of the Shuttle Columbia.

During the very difficult days following the loss of Columbia and its heroic crew, the Forest Service provided immediate and outstanding assistance for the vital recovery work that went on over a 250 mile range in east Texas and west Louisiana.

Indeed, it's a miracle that we were able to recover the better part of 40 percent of the orbiter, that is not only something that protected public safety as a consequence of the diligence of the U.S. Forest Service team that was engaged in this activity, but we've also been able to inform the investigation effort in a way that we could not have done were it not for the extraordinary efforts on the parts of thousands of U.S. Forest Service folks who were engaged in the activity.

The long hours, the incredibly harsh terrain, the really crummy weather conditions during the course of this past winter—all of that made it an extremely difficult effort. I had the privilege of visiting east Texas and the Forest Service team, as well as all the folks engaged at NASA, the Environmental Protection Agency and the better part of 20 other Federal agencies, state and

local outfits as well who were all engaged in the activity with my good friend Deputy Secretary Jim Mosely and with the U.S. Forest Chief Dale Bosworth on at least one of those occasions. Speaking for Jim, as I'm very careful to do, but I'm confident in saying, we walked away extremely impressed, not only with the commitment but also with the professionalism of the U.S. Forest Service personnel involved there.

The best way to describe, Secretary Veneman, their approach to how they adopted this particular challenge and working through the issues that were necessary in order to achieve the kind of recovery effort that was possible was that members of the U.S. Forest Service teams all wore shirts that Jim and I observed as we were there that simply stated, "Their mission has become our mission." Indeed it was the best example, and the most extraordinary, inspiring example of intergovernmental cooperation, interagency cooperation, indeed just among human beings to accomplish the same objectives. And absolutely no evidence whatsoever of the usual challenges that accompany these kinds of relationships on observational matters such as that. It is with that kind of spirit that I am certain that this kind of relationship between NASA and the Agriculture Department will be nothing more than enhanced as a result of these very close kinship and

association as a result not only of success but also of cases of tragedy in which we've helped each other.

So we within the NASA family we are really indebted to the Forest Service team and to our colleagues from a variety of federal, state and local agencies for an outstanding and selfless efforts. I want to thank Secretary Veneman for her very important leadership in making this possible during the course of it. Each time I asked for any assistance it was granted immediately and with great enthusiasm. For that, I don't even know how to begin to thank you, madam Secretary, for all the effort and leadership that you employed in that case. It is my privilege to introduce Secretary Ann Veneman.